

THE CODE



AIXIA LI



'Bound feet woman', Photograph by
JAMES RICALTON, 1900.

AIXIA LI

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The Code: Chapter 1, Introduction

Foot-binding history

To be born woman is to know
 Although they do not speak of it at
 school
 Women must labor to be beautiful.
 -W.B.Yeats

In 2011 began the exploration into my project, which would ultimately be called 'Chan' the inspiration stemming from the novel 'Three-Inch Golden Lotus'.¹ The story follows the life of Fragrant Lotus, a Chinese woman, from her first ordeal with foot-binding to her last 'hurrah'. The impressive and memorable story gave rise to the question: "Why have I never met a foot-bound woman before? Has this custom disappeared? Are there women alive who possess the 'Three-Inch golden lotus'?" These questions lead me to look further into the age old Chinese custom of foot-binding.

In Chapter one - Beauty of Pain, I discuss references, including Chinese philosophy, literature, myth and the reflection of social issues, to present the highly complex intertwining background of foot-binding.

Foot-binding is the custom of binding the feet of young girls painfully tight to prevent further growth, resulting in feet that develop a smaller and sharper shape. Women end up walking solely on their heels due to the deformed foot. Not until the early 20th century did the custom of foot-binding begin dying out because of changing social conditions.² Since then the issue has become taboo in China.

As the practice of foot-binding reached its peak in ancient China as a national aesthetic, lotus feet became synonymous with femininity, beauty, and eroticism in late Qing dynasty. Bound feet was a mark of beauty that became the prerequisite for finding a husband, as well

as an avenue for poorer women to marry into money. According to the novel by Feng Jicai 'Three-Inch Golden Lotus', there is a song:

'Bind your feet small,
 A scholar you shall marry.
 Bind you feet big,
 A blind man you shall marry.
 Then you'll eat cornbread and hot
 peppers daily.'

Foot-binding was unique to females of late imperial China. However, the concept and practice of enduring violence and pain, mutilation and self-mutilation in the name of beauty can be found in almost every culture and civilization, i.e. circumcision in Africa, the long-necked tribe of Thailand, the girdle in Europe etc. Therefore, developments regarding foot-binding may not simply be interpreted as Chinese women under repression waking up to revolt against patriarchal society. In other words, foot-binding requires a cross-cultural and interdisciplinary perspective. An examination of the practice in the context of history, literature, linguistics, and psychoanalysis is crucial to comprehensive understanding of this cultural fetish. Although, despite the way in which this culture has influenced China for thousands of years, there are now few women alive who have had their feet bound. According to Wang Ping, in '1966, the year Mao Zedong launched the Culture Revolution to fight against the remaining powers of feudalism, capitalism, and revisionism in China', everything changed. After the revolution the practice of foot-binding, which was seen as a symbol of feudal oppression of women for almost half century, began to be eliminated.⁴

Given change in the socio-political climate in China, the question

-1-, Feng Jicai, is an author who focuses most of his works on writing stories which explain historical events that have occurred in his hometown of Tian Jin, China. He also writes stories about the lives of several intelligent men. Feng Jicai is also an artist who specializes in calligraphy and painting. 'Three-Inch Golden Lotus' University of Hawaii Press. 1944.

-2-, In 1638, the Emperor Qing tend to forbid foot-binding, until Mao took over China in 1949, foot-binding is truly finished.

-3-, 'Three-Inch Golden Lotus' University of Hawaii Press. 1944. PP.20

-4-, Wang Ping, a Chinese-American author and academic. Her writings center around the past and present of China, and the experiences of Chinese immigrants in America. 'Aching for beauty': Foot-binding in China. University of Minnesota Press. pp. preface.

arises: ‘What have we achieved from this custom of disappearance?’ This is not only a critique of socio-political issues but also the notion of changing the national aesthetic norms, philosophy, morality, human belief, etc. Yet, **‘how does one make people from different cultures understand this symbolic Asian custom without misunderstanding it’**. My ‘Chan’ project plays on these Chinese elements. However its main purpose is to reduce the narrative from language - ‘linguistically silence’, and shrink the distance between spectator and visual installations. In doing that I aim to break down representation at the structure base of the language (sign) itself *s*. What we are is hidden inside language(sign), and maybe the true meaning of signs are inaccessible and indecipherable even to those who speak the language - a process of decoding and recoding.

While most of my artwork is based on characteristics of Chinese culture, I am interested in the combination of both Asian and Western culture. I was born in 1987, after the Chinese political turmoil (cultural revolution), without war, people revolution, social upheaval. During the same year, Mr Deng Xiaoping⁶ advocated his comprehensive plans for recreating socialism with Chinese characteristics. Thereafter, China takes a step toward a new future, developing its economy encompasses the biggest policy decision of Chinese administration. Nowadays, people describe China as a rising and responsible global power. However, China is still a typical ‘communist’ country full of invisible rules and control. There is no true freedom of speech or human rights. My work is based on the system of rules symbolized in Chinese elements, such as Chinese characters, oriental painting, calligraphy, etc.

My project centers around **control** and **rules**. I think this notion has been a great part of my focus as an artist and is evident in almost every artwork that I have made. I often try to visualize the idea of something

being controlled or something artificial, two concepts that both are based on my thought that there is an overwhelming distance (misunderstanding) between people. For this reason, I tend to question the basics as part of my research; research that has to do with finding a kind of material trace, an image or sound that can shrink the distance. I could call it a search for finding different forms of **intimacy**, but these words are used only as a means by which to conceal the search as a **code**. When using the Chinese element as a medium and questioning the characteristics of Chinese custom, I must embrace the **non-narrative**, because perhaps only then, could a difference be perceived, a thing learned, a kind of knowledge. Also because the materiality of an interpretation (language) based medium might be destined to be parochial.⁷

Even today, we can find the reflection of foot-binding in our daily life. For instance, cosmetic surgery or high heels. People translate beauty by means of physical surgery. These issues made me start a deep conversation into the artificial aspects of society. My goal is two fold. First it looks at different mediums (materials) through which the lost tradition of foot-binding can be represented. Secondly, it attempts to bridge the gap between the East and West, theory and practice, to analyze the phenomenon behind the disappearance of this aspect of Chinese culture.

-5-, Further analysis, **Chapter 2: Sign-code**

-6-, **Deng Xiaoping** (22 August 1904-19 February 1997) was a politician and reformist leader of Communist Party of China who led China towards a market economy.

-7-, Further analysis, **Chapter 2: Artistic practice: 1+1=2 (or) 1+1=possibilities**

The Code: Chapter 1, Beauty of Pain

1.1, Form: Shape&Quality

A woman's face may wrinkle, but her feet never fade, age, or become subjected to the cycle of season as long as the body lives. Feet are separated from the body and serve as fixed objects of male eroticism. A lotus foot is praised and worshipped as if it encompasses the beauty of the entire body: glistening and white like skin; arched like eyebrows; pointed like jade fingers; round like breasts; small like a mouth; red like lips. As Fang Xun⁸ who calls himself 'Doctor of the Fragrant Lotus' wrote about the shape and quality of bound feet in the eighteenth century.

Five principal style:

lotus petal, new moon,
harmonious bow, bamboo shoot,
water chestnut.

SHAPE

-Eight kinds of feet-

- 1, 'Lotus petal on all sides' - perfectly narrow and arched, three to four inches long.
- 2, 'lotus with silk linen sides' - correctly bound, an inch longer, preventing the wearing of sharply pointed shoes.
- 3, 'Long hairpin lotus' - shaped like a bamboo shoot, but too long and thin to satisfy critical aesthetic standers.
- 4, 'Single leaf lotus' - soles narrow and flat.
- 5, 'Buddha's head lotus' - instep very full, hunched like a knot on the head of Sakyamuni.
- 6, 'Piercing heart lotus' - hidden high-heeled shoes
- 7, 'Double flowers' - toes pointing outward.
- 8, 'Intertwined heart' - callused heels.

⁻⁸⁻, Fang Xun, doctor of Fragrant Lotus, 'The classification of the Qualities of Fragrant Lotuses'.

QUALITY

-Nine qualities-

Divine quality(A1):

nether plump nor slender but as perfect in size as the ancient beauty Xi Shi, who looks superlative in every posture.

Wondrous(A2):

weak and slender, like a willow branch learning for support and bending in the breeze.

Immortal(A3):

straight-boned, independent, and not of the common herd. She is as spiritual as Taoists who live in the mountains and eat only pine seeds, though thin and cold like the poem of Jia Dao and Meng Jiao(both Tang poets).

Precious article(B1):

conspicuous and brilliant as a peacock, but the lack of her foot is too wide and disproportionate.

Pure article(B2):

long and thin, like the neck of a goose with outstretched throat crying aloud or a duck with its neck elongated flight.

Seductive article(C1):

fleshy and short, relatively wide and round, like the royal concubine Yang Yuhuan's dance and song. Frailty is the mark of femininity, but a woman with this foot shape can easily withstand a blowing wind.

Excessive article(C1):

narrow but not smooth, slender but insufficiently pointed, reminding the beholder of MiFei's landscape painting with one strong rock but crumbling clouds and precipices.

Ordinary article(C2):

plump and almost common, like a red water chestnut in the autumn water and distant green on the spring mountain. If placed among chickens, it can still stand out like crane.

False article(C3):

it has such a large heel that she gives the impression of a climbing monkey, as Yang Xinshu described, ‘A madam whose origin is from a low family tries to act like a lady, but can not pass.’⁹

Women were labeled like products in a market to display their feet to attract consumers, which raises another question: **Why was ‘Fragrant Lotus’ beautiful?**

The rules and evaluation structure of the beauty of bound feet was used as a way to appraise the ‘product’. Just like the Chinese curio market, the value of curio are based on the evaluation of the connoisseur, a logical system. Women’s lotus-feet became a fascinating product to men, developing into fetishism. The bound feet are the only part of a woman’s body that will never be changed by age. Lyotard argues, “Aesthetic is a natural communication, instinctive desire of humans. It is not about the knowledge, something naturally and animally” ¹⁰. Yet, bound feet are artificially made, the beauty of bound feet is based on the rules and standards by which humans achieve form, the ‘ideal world’, according to Plato ¹¹. People became infatuated with it like an eternal object (curio), in the name of beauty, artificially, painfully and perpetually. Lotus feet were a monument of the ‘aura’ of the Chinese emperor, revealing this morbid aesthetic. This transformation of this foot-binding custom displays the fundamental aristocracy and aesthetic power of Fragrant Lotus.

-9-, Wang Ping, ‘Aching for beauty: Foot-binding in China’, University of Minnesota Press. PP. 103-105.

-10-, Jean- Francois Lyotard, ‘The Inhuman’, published with the assistance of French Ministry of Culture, English translation copyright, Polity Press 1991. ‘...in the sublime, nature stops addressing itself to us in this language of forms, in these visual or sound ‘landscapes’ which bring about the pure pleasure of the beautiful and inspire commentary as an attempt at decipherment...’ PP.137

-11-, Further analysis, Chapter 2: Imitation and Production.

The Code: Chapter 1, Beauty of Pain

1.2, Zoomorphic Feet

‘Four of toes were curled in like
so many dead caterpillars.’
-Aching for Beauty

This metaphor display the process which is used to make a pair of three-inch feet resemble the different stages of an insect, like the caterpillar spinning thread and wrapping itself in a cocoon, then coming out of it, transformed from a crawling creature into a butterfly, or like a cicada shedding its skin from time to time to grow. The difference is that in the case of insects the goal is to grown bigger while the aim of foot-binding is to reduce feet to the degree that they almost disappear. **When the foot is forced to arch like a bow, it gives the illusion of being part of the leg** (Figure 3,4). It is quite similar to effect created by high- heeled shoes. The most important part, the raised heel alters the sudden break of line of the leg, making the body appear taller and straight, **away from the dirt, from gravity**. The illusion of overcoming gravity and flying up to the sky is what the tiny-footed lady aim to achieve.

‘Goddesses, female immortals,
and girls with special talents in the
paintings of those periods all show
this flying movement and highly
aestheticized expression of femininity.
Their faces and upper bodies were
depicted in detail, whereas their
lower bodies, especially their feet,
were weiled in clouds or fabrics.’¹² (Figure 5)

As is depicted in the picture (Figure 2) of a pair three inches shoes, such feet and shoes resemble the hoof of an animal, not the hoof of a

-12-, Wang Ping, ‘Aching for beauty: Foot-binding in China’, University of Minnesota Press. pp. 11.

cow or a horse, but the paw of a fox or hoof of deer, which is associated with the myth of foot-binding. With the help of high-heeled lotus shoes, what remains of original foot becomes the extension of the erect leg, resembling the hoof of an animal (Figure 7). This invention seems to have been inspired by native American mythology, such as the Deer Lady in and around Oklahoma, U.S.A. She appears at various times as an old woman, or a young beautiful maiden, or a deer. Some descriptions assign her a human female upper body and the lower body of a white-tailed deer. The deer woman is said to sometimes be seen as a beautiful woman just off the trail or behind a bush, beckoning to men. She is often said to have all features of a young woman, except her feet which are shaped like deer hooves and her brown deer’s eyes. Men who are lured into her presence often notice too late that she is not a natural woman and are then stomped to death. *The Deer Lady is a result of copulation between a man and a deer, a mixture of half-human, half-animal and half-god, half monster*. The Deer Lady is a complicated synthesis, the composition of dichotomies; ugly versus beautiful, desire versus death, human versus animal, etc. This monstrous duality, however, makes her a symbol of beauty and fecundity, just as the dual nature of bound feet turn tiny-foot women into the ideal of femininity, the symbol of morality, and the object of desire.

Chinese folklore and mythology shows the similar figures of fox-footed femme fatales. Da Ji is a very famous mythological figure in Shang dynasty, She was a favorite concubine of King Zhou¹³ of Shang. She is a classic example of how beauty made the empire decay in Chinese culture. Da Ji is portrayed as an evil fox spirit in the Chinese novel ‘Feng Shen Yan Yi’¹⁴‘封神演义’. Yet it is exactly this stubborn

-13-, King Zhou was the pejorative posthumous name given to Di Xin or Emperor Xin, the last king of Shang Dynasty of ancient China.

-14-, ‘Fengshen Yanyi’, also as known as ‘Fengshen Bang’, and translated as ‘The Investiture of Gods’ or ‘The Creation of the Gods’, is a 16th century Chinese classical novel and one of the major vernacular Chinese epic novels written during the Ming Dynasty(1368-1644), by Xu Zhonglin. The story is set in the era of the declining Shang Dynasty(1600 BC-1046 BC) and the rise of Zhou Dynasty(1046 BC-256 BC). It intertwines numerous elements of Chinese mythology, including deities, immortals and spirits.

animality that gives off the strongest, most irresistible sexual allure, and it is this base animality that has brought down many kingdoms, many civilizations.

In the art world, Francis Bacon's painting shows a zone of indiscernibility or undecidability between human and animal (Figure 8). Sometimes the human head of Bacon's painting is replaced by an animal, but it is not the animal as a form, but rather the animal as a trait. For instance, a real dog is treated as the shadow of its master, or conversely, the man's shadow itself assumes an autonomous and indeterminate animal existence. Bacon's most isolated figure is already a coupled figure, man is coupled with his animal in an implied bullfight. All bodies, whether animate or inanimate, are subject to the effects of external stimuli from other bodies. Only animate bodies are sensible to such impressions, because of the mobility of the spirits which pervade them. All animate bodies react to stimuli as a result of movement of the animal spirits. The animal spirits are also responsible for all feelings. Stimuli which are intrinsically pleasant, terrifying, or painful to human nature produce specific motions of the spirits which result both in characteristic postures of the body (goose and shaking for fear, for instance) and a mental response appropriate to the stimulus ¹⁵. Bacon believed that the most direct effects on the animal spirits result from the stimulus of other spirits: drunkenness is accounted for as a perturbation of the animal spirits caused by intrusion of the spirits of the wine, which disrupt the natural motion of the animal spirits, causing both lack of control over movement and hallucination ¹⁶.

The similar phenomenon is seen in foot-binding: binding the feet painfully tight to prevent the natural growth is also disrupting the natural motion of the animal spirit. However, the disparate part that is human tries to distinguish itself from the animal. At the same time

the culture of foot-binding explores different ways to achieve physical beauty based on animal figures and forms from the natural world. Humans, represented as a superior animal in charge of lesser species in nature think the instinctive desires of animals and humans are different. However, Kojève puts forward a different theory on the fundamental difference between the animal and human realms:

‘For man to be truly human, for man to be essentially and really different from an animal, his human desire must actually win out over his animal desire. Now, all desire is desire for a value. The supreme value for an animal is its animal life. All the desires of an animal are in the final analysis a function of its desire to preserve its life. Human desire, therefore, must win out over this desire for preservation. In other words, man's humanity ‘comes to light’ only if he risks his(animal) life for the sake of his human Desire...And that is why to speak of “origin” of Self-Consciousness is necessarily to speak of risk of life (for an essentially nonvital end).’ ¹⁷

The confusion of this conclusion is that to achieve the recognition of the other, an individual must prove to the other that he has overcome his animal self and is no longer afraid of death. Someone could claim that if everyone is indeed human and able to overcome the animal

-15-, Gilles Deleuze, ‘Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation’, University of Minnesota Press, 2003. PP. 20-21.

-16-, Lisa Jardine, ‘Francis Bacon: Discovery and the Art of Discourse’, Cambridge University Press, 1974. PP. 89-91.

-17-, Ethan Kleinberg, ‘Generation Existential: Heidegger's Philosophy in France’, 1927-1961, Cornell University Press, 2005, PP. 74.

desire for self-preservation, then all men would die in battle and there would be no human left on the earth. Indeed, humans cannot separate their instinctive sexual desire from the same sexual desire found in animals. As long as sensuous beings of flesh and blood exist, they will have instinctive sexual desires, just as they desire food. These must be satisfied in real life as well as in artistic fantasy. From a historical perspective of both eastern and western art, all cultures include the eternal themes of sexual love, maternal love, combat, and death. We find these themes, especially sexual love, in every kind of artwork from simple folk songs and tales to sophisticated works for the upper classes, including paintings, sculptures, music, dance etc. **Moreover, in foot-binding, three-inch lotus feet are a container of the same instinctive animal desire. It is a mixture taboos of half-human and half-animal, ugly and beautiful, yet part of the entire body.**

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1.3, Confucianism

**‘Woman’s bodies were always available
for use - ideological, physical - by men’
Katherine Carlitz**

A Woman’s body does not belong to herself but to the family, clan, and ultimately the monarchy. Katherine suggests that the dedicated female body becomes in fact an arena to display loyalty at any cost:

‘The characteristics of the female body gave it unique possibilities as a theater for the drama of virtue, Women’s breasts, providing essential nourishment, could be offered in filial service. Penetrable, woman’s body was the site where the drama of resistance to invasion could be acted out. Weaker, it could shame men unwilling to rise to the same heights of virtue. Procreative, it was a resource to be sold or controlled. Attractive, it offered opportunities to men to prove their moral worth by exercising self-restraint.’

Confucianism gave rise to strict rules to the role of women in the home and society at large. The traditional ideal woman was a dependent being whose behavior was governed by the ‘three obediences and four virtues’, ‘三从四德’. The three obediences were obedience to father before marriage, the husband after marriage, and the son in case of widows. The four virtues were propriety in behavior, speech, demeanor and employment. Education for women was intended to inculcate these virtues. Men should be always on their guard, women from good families (liang jia fu nv, 良家妇女) must follow ‘three obediences and four virtues’. The opposite example of Confucianism philosophy regards

women, especially beautiful ones trained for entertaining men, as huo shui, 祸水 - disastrous water/flood of state, family, and gender roles.

For Confucianism, selfish human desires (si yu, 私欲) are the biggest enemies of real reason and truth (li, 理), therefore they must be eliminated. To translate this into practice, men must first of all keep away from concubines, beautiful widows, and prostitutes. Zhu Xi 18 wrote a poem called ‘self -warning’, he composed this poem to remind himself how dangerous women could be: (My translation)

‘The body has become light after ten
years floating on the sea,
Yet on the return, one still feels for
the dimples on a girl’s check.
Nothing is more dangerous than human
desire in this world,
Few have been spared being ruined
once they get here!’

A beautiful lady will attract men due to an instinctive reaction. However, based on Confucian philosophy, men should keep away from (si yu) selfish desire, some believed that women were the obstacles that prevented them from passing the official exams or writing books. In reality and in many Ming and Qing stories, men usually moved away from women into isolated study to prepare for the exams (Ke Jv, 科举) 19. ‘Some intellectuals actually inflicted castration on themselves to show their determination to do away with women so that they could concentrate on their studies and writing. During the period of Jiajing reign (1522-66), Ke Weixiong castrated himself so that he would not be distracted by his sexual desire while writing his New Edition of

-18-, Zhu Xi (1130-1200) was a Song Dynasty Confucian scholar who became the leading figure of School of Principle and the most influential rationalist Neo-Confucian in China.

-19-, Ke Jv (605-1905), the imperial examination was an examination system in Imperial China designed to select the best administrative officials for the state’s bureaucracy.

Song History. He claimed he was just following the example of Han historian Sima Qian ²⁰ (about 135-?B.C.), who wrote *Tai shi gong shu*, 太史公书 (also called *Shiji*, 史记), the first book of Chinese history presented in a series of biographies. Sima Qian completed the book after he was castrated by the emperor's order for defending a captured general.²¹ Unable to use the female body as a fetishistic substitute to act out or release their fear, anxiety, frustration, and desire, they felt they had no choice but to turn to their own bodies. Their self-castration was an effort to inscribe write on the male body. In contrast to men, when women were forced to remarry or were raped by bandits and soldiers, they often committed suicide to maintain their chastity.

Moreover, foot-binding became an efficient way to keep women in their place - the inner chamber - physically, mentally, and symbolically, to be *liang jia fu nu* (good women), away from temptation. The interesting duality of bound feet is that it was designed to keep women chaste in an attempt to live up to the teachings of Confucianism, yet simultaneously it was highly eroticized. At the same time, it mirrors China's constanting oscillation between two extremes: Confucian's moral restraint to eliminate all human desire, and the indulgence in extravagance, expenditure, and sensual pleasures, particularly in food and sex. This contradictory nature of Chinese society is manifested in the duality of bound feet, as both moral enforcement and an erotic object, at once ugly and beautiful, repulsive and enticing, comic and tragic, weak and powerful. What are the beauty standards of femininity in China?

Two important elements of feminine aesthetics were illness and melancholy. When we look at the description of women's makeup, fashion, jewelry, and manner from Chinese literature and oriental painting, they are mostly based on the aesthetic of melancholy. The famous figure from 'Dream of the Red Chamber'²² Lin Daiyu is a typical representation of this melancholic Chinese aesthetic norm. The novel

⁻²⁰⁻, **Sima Qian** (145 or 135 BC- 86 BC) was a prefect of the Grand Scribes (Taishigong, 太史公) of Han Dynasty. He is the father of Chinese historiography for his work. **Shi Ji** (109 BC-91BC), was the magnum opus of Sima Qian, in which he recounted Chinese history from the time of yellow Emperor until his own time.

designates Lin Daiyu as one of the Twelve Beauties of Jinling, and describes her as a lonely, proud and ultimately tragic figure, she is the soul of Red Camber. In Daiyu's famous poem 'Lin Daiyu Buries Fallen Flower Petals' (Figure 6), she wrote: (My translation)

The blossoms fade and falling fill the air,
Of fragrance and bright hues bereft and bare.
Floss drifts and flutters round the
Maiden's bower,
Or softly strikes against her curtained door...
But better their remains in silk to lay,
And bury underneath the wholesome clay,
Pure substances the pure earth to enrich,
Then left to soak and stink in some
foul ditch.
Farewell, dear flowers, forever now, thus
buried as was best,
I have not yet divined when I with you shall
sink to rest.
Let others laugh flower-burial to see:
Another year who will be burying me?
As petals drop and spring begins to fail,
The bloom of youth, too, sickens and
turns pale.
One day, when spring has gone and
youth has fled.

⁻²¹⁻, '**Dream of the Red Chamber**', 红楼梦, composed by **Cao Xueqin**, is one of China's Four Great Classical Novels. The novel circulated in manuscript copies with various titles until its print publication, in 1791. The novel is also often known as '**The Story of the Stone**'. The first 80 chapters were written by Cao Xueqin, Cheng Weiyuan added 40 additional chapter to complete the novel.

⁻²²⁻, **Lin Daiyu**, one of the important major character in '**dream of the Red Chamber**'. She is sickly, but beautiful in a way that is unconventional. Fragile emotionally, prone to fits of jealousy, Daiyu is nevertheless and extremely accomplished poet and musician in the novel.

The maiden and the flowers will both
be dead.

‘Women are floating and weightless like a
fairy or goddess, fragile and delicate like a
child, hidden and mysterious like
unreachable treasure. Men can not help
feeling pity for women and falling in love
with them. All these are indispensable
elements of Chinese eroticism and
the female allure.’

Wang Ping

To be beautiful, or to look beautiful, is an aesthetic impulse as
primary, strong, and persistent as the survival instinct. It is quite un-
derstandable that when a little boy desires a lotus feet girl for his bride,
women do anything to have a perfectly bound pair of feet in order to
prepare themselves for marriage market, which in a patriarchal society
provides their livelihood, identity, and social status.

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1.4, Violence

foot-binding, high heels, cosmetic surgery

How do we explain such pain and endurance, such persuasiveness and pervasiveness, such contradictory qualities, and such mad obsession with a pair of tiny feet for more than a thousand years.

To be beautiful, women change their physical body to satisfy men and themselves, to be a work of art. The acts themselves are intrinsically violent not only drastically changing the physical body, but also the mind. Some would say that the violent act of dramatically changing one's own body is an archaic Chinese concept like invisible poison, corroding women's ideology. Foot-binding is an example of how painful and violent the need to be beautiful can be: violence (pain) and beauty being twin brothers, physically and mentally always together.

Nowadays, high heels have become a women's weapon to display feminine qualities. Shoes with high, narrow heels convey a powerful erotic aura, as high heels give women a rocking, sensual walk. Like foot-binding, high heels also cause a hollow back, pushing out both bosom and bottom. High-heeled shoes are much in demand as a fetish, the same as tiny feet. The heels must be tight-fitting and are often laced up as a result. For masochists, pain and being kicked or stepped on by a woman are combined with (sexual) desire. The shoe fetish is a substitute for the desire of another person. Compared to foot-binding, the pain of high heels is on the different level, yet the essential concept of erotism and aesthetic standard are similar. However, here is a research that shows how uncomfortable and aching of high-heeled shoes:

The most important criterion for recognition of harmful culture practice is damage to the health of women and girls. It is this damage that justifies labelling such practices harmful, and in case of wearing of high heels the evidence of severe health damage is plentiful. Eight out of ten women who replied to a global shoe survey carried out by the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons said their feet hurt, mainly because of high heels. The 2001 study found that 59 per cent of women wear

uncomfortable shoes daily for at least an hour with 'work' or 'style' being given as the reason by 77 per cent. The most commonly reported sources of pain were callouses and heel pain (Ananova, 2001). Another 2001 study found that one in five women suffer painful feet because they wear shoes to please partners or employers. The study (BBC, 2001) found that one in ten would wear 'uncomfortable shoes if they looked good'. The results showed that although women follow fashion only one in three like wearing high heels. Over 80 per cent would not change type of shoes they wore solely to alleviate a foot problem. One in six thought a correctly fitting shoe pressed the toes together. The British research team estimated that three out of four women may have a serious foot problem by the time they reach their 60s. The podiatrist who led the research said, 'Improvement in women's foot health are only likely when healthy, well-fitting shoes become a norm for society, within or without the realms of fashion', but manufacturers, he said, did not make foot health a priority (BBC, 2001)

High heels have become the modern day equivalent of Chinese foot-binding. Much like the physical deformities caused by foot-binding, prolonged use of high heels may result in bunions, hammer toes, shortening of calf muscle and damage to the Achilles tendon, which can make it impossible for women to walk comfortably without such shoes. By perpetuating the necessity of such shoes male fetishists may continue to get considerable satisfaction.

In the twenty-first century, Cosmetic surgery has become commonplace for the average person, especially in Asia (South Korea, Japan, China). In this context, cosmetic surgery is not a medical procedure for specialized correction of an abnormality or the restoration of form function. Here cosmetic surgery refers to the aesthetic of plastic surgery, which involves techniques intended for the enhancement of appearance through surgical and medical techniques, and is specifically concerned with maintaining 'normal' appearance, restoring it, or enhancing it beyond the average level toward some aesthetic ideal. Some people believe that improving one's physical beauty is an extension of science. Yet the process is extremely torturous. Although, the complications are very rare nowadays, one should seriously consider all prob-

able risks involved before proceeding with plastic surgery. Common surgical complications include bleeding, infections, seromas, scarring, necrosis, nerve damage and adverse reactions to anesthesia.

Despite these risks, cosmetic surgery is now common in countries such as the United Kingdom, France, and Germany as well as in Asian countries mentioned above. Cosmetic surgery has become an accepted practice and countries such as China, India and South Korea have become Asia's biggest cosmetic surgery markets. There have been accounts of children undergoing cosmetic eye surgery in South Korea. The practice has become so commonplace that the parents have given their daughter cosmetic surgery as an eighteenth birthday present. Cosmetic surgery has become the aesthetic trend among Chinese women of this generation, replacing the thousand year old aesthetic of traditional foot-binding. The example below shows one of the worst plastic surgery disasters in recent history:

Hang Mioku, a 48 year-old woman from South Korea, is so addicted to plastic surgery, that she was left unrecognizable after her obsession led her to inject cooking oil into her face. She did the first plastic surgery procedure when she was 28. Following operation after operation, her face was eventually left enlarged and disfigured. The surgeons she visited refused to carry out any more work on her. One suggested that her obsession could be a sign of a psychological disorder. So Hang resorted to injecting cooking oil into her face. It became so grotesquely large that she was called 'standing fan' by children in her neighborhood due to her large face and small body.

If foot-binding is a violent way of torturing Chinese women's feet to achieve beauty, cosmetic surgery goes a further step, spreading to the whole body. Nowadays cosmetic surgery has become a common way for people to achieve their desired beauty. So much so that it gives rise to the question why people think they will be more beautiful after surgery. Or it is a question of spiritual self-fulfillment. For generations humans, whether western or eastern have been driven to change their physical body in order to achieve 'beauty'. Women in particular believe that a beautiful lady will have a 'better' life, propagating the

stigma that pain and beauty are twin brothers.

On the other hand, the confusion of the question is when people understand. Despite the knowledge of how painful and dangerous surgery can be, people seem unable to stop this process of self-torture to achieve beauty. It is easy enough to delude ourselves that the motivation behind the pain is beauty, but some people also experience physical pleasure as a result of this painful self-inflicted torture—an instinctive physical reaction to pain.

This photograph (Figure 1) is the only visual evidence of this particular form of Chinese torture, taken by a French photographer, Carpeaux, who witnessed a ling chi scene in Beijing in 1905 (perhaps the last one, since the punishment was banned by law in 1905). The term ling chi literally means a hill that slopes gradually, a metaphor for a slow, gradual death. It was first recorded in the Five Dynasties period. Interestingly, Georges Bataille received these photos from the French psychoanalyst Dr. Broel twenty years later. The condemned man's expression in the photos—seemingly smiling as seen in profile and ecstatic from the front view—greatly puzzled as well as excited Bataille. He believed that the pain and terror of the punishment were so shocking to the body that the condemned man had reached 'the point of ecstasy.' Bataille himself experienced such 'ecstasy' through his obsessive meditation over the photographs of this Chinese man being cut into pieces on a post. The moment of revelation so stunned Bataille's body that it enabled him to make the fundamental connection between apparent opposites—extreme horror and divine ecstasy.

Some research shows the brain has two nerve centers, pain and pleasure. The position of both nerve centers are very close. When people physically feel a strong ache due to the outside stimulation, the pain nerve center will excite the pleasure nerve, and vice versa. This could explain why the faces of actors in pornography convey such pain and ugliness in their moments of ecstasy.



Figure 1:
'Ling Chi', Photograph by
JAMES RICALTON, 1900



Figure 2:
'Three-inch Lotus shoes', 50X40cm, c-print,
2011



Figure 3:
'Bound feet', X-ray Photo.



Figure 4:
'High heels', X-ray Photo.



Figure 5:
'Untitled', Oriental Painting. Around
A.D.910.



Figure 6:
'Lin Daiyu Buries Fallen Flower Petals',
In book: 'Dream of Red Chamber',
Qing Dynasty.



Figure 7:
Hooves of deer



Figure 8:
'Three Studies for Figures at the Base of Crucifixion (1944)' by Francis Bacon. Oil and pastel on hardboard, each 94cm x 74cm. Tate Gallery, London. Courtesy Marlborough Fine Art, Ltd., **London**.

The Code: Chapter 2, Introduction:

‘Chan’ project:

- My background
- Artist statement

In Chapter 2- 'Chan' Project, based on the Chinese theory before, I display notions of different western philosophers and artists, in order to further discuss my artistic practice and research method. I will combine my art proceeding with each subheadings in the following sections to demonstrate my thoughts and practice.

My background

I was born in China in 1987. With the help of Mr Deng Xiaoping's comprehensive concept for recreating socialism with Chinese characteristics, China was able to take a step towards a new future. After the cultural revolution the Chinese administration made developing its economy their primary goal and the biggest change in policy. Indeed, I was born without war, revolution or social upheaval. However, China remained a typical 'communist' country with invisible rules and control.

There is a Chinese saying, '**Nothing can be accomplished without norms or standards**'. 'Etiquette' is a major theme in the Confucian doctrine. However, the rules have become less strict nowadays, but they used to dictate societal norms throughout China in late imperial era. Although the hierarchical behaviors of Confucian China are less evident nowadays, there has been a psychological effect on the Chinese people. Today, China as the biggest communist country in the world, led by one political party. The rules that were once law have been become more implicit and invisible. For example instead of censoring freedom of speech outright, the Chinese government has blocked many websites (Youtube, Facebook, Twitter, Google, etc) to avoid anti-government sentiments.

Despite the Chinese government's attempts news in China has become more transparent due to the widespread nature of some websites such as the Chinese version of Twitter, Weibo. On August 14, 2011,

residents of Dalian organized a 'stroll' (used here as a euphemism for 'protest' in China to avoid censorship) in the People Square. The protest against the Fujia factory, which had been emitting poisonous gases into the air for a long time, received widespread attention through Weibo, blogs and Internet forums. Tens of thousands of people gathered in the square to protest, demanding the factory be immediately shut down and relocated, and that investigation into the factory be made public. Developments in mass media in recent years, such as the accessibility, speed and interactivity of the internet, has affected the way in which the government can block or censor such events.

Indeed, I grew up in an environment full of invisible control and rules. My projects have always centered around these unnatural and artificial issues. I use different mediums to present my concept practically in order to have a deeper conversation with society and myself to figure out who I am and what I really want.

Artist statement:

-My project focuses on the concepts of control and rules. I think this notion has been a great part of my focus as an artist and been present in most of my artwork. It has to do with something being controlled or artificial that I try to visualize and the constant thought that there is an overwhelming distance (misunderstanding) between people. For this reason, I tend to question the basics as a part of my research. Research that has to do with finding a kind of material trace, an image or sound that can shrink the distance. I could call it a search for finding different forms of **intimacy**, but these words used only conceal the search as a **code**. So when using the Chinese element as a medium and questioning the characteristics of Chinese custom, I must embrace the **non-narrative**, because perhaps only then, there would be a perceived difference, a learned thing, a kind of knowledge. Also because the materiality of an interpretation (language) based medium might be destined to be parochial.

-Since 2011, I have been exploring my project 'chan', and repre-

senting the aesthetic of the disappearing Chinese custom of foot-binding. The work of 'chan' is being developed around the same research and system of decoding and recoding but they questioning different senses. **I am interested in how to visualize the difference between senses in order to understand how meaning is constructed and how is it perceived. Here rises the question**, 'how can I shrink the distance between Asia and Western to present this custom' I try to play with different materials in my project to represent the lost custom and gap the bridge between the East and West, theory and practice to analyse the phenomenon behind this sophisticated phenomenon.

Structure of the project(see from my Portfolio)²³:

I have so far divided this project into three parts.

-photo installation, Old women's portrait are incorporated with one of Chinese characters 缠(chan, means binding), has been split into the 13 individual strokes necessary to form the character according to the rules for writing Chinese characters. I repeated each stroke inside a circle based on the grid of the photograph (the women's portrait). Besides being the strokes for the 'binding' character, the circle pattern also covers the identity (eyes) of the women. The chinese character has been deconstructed and repeated (decoded and recoded), translating it back to a symbolic image from narrative language. This photo installations is lit by LED light boxes which flicker behind the image at different frequencies.

-wood box, Each wooden box is the interview of a single foot bound woman, written on epoxy resin and framed in the same type of wooden boxes which were used to archive documents or books in late Imperial China. Because the text of the interview is layered it becomes difficult to discern individual characters and is impossible to read. In doing so I break down the representation in the structure base: the language. What we are is hidden inside the code, and is inaccessible and

indecipherable for all, even those who can understand the characters

-two channel videos, I simulated the process of foot-binding, binding my feet, step on flowers.....,The narrative filming process – my feet being bound - was divided into two videos, filmed from the front as well as the back. *Shrinking the distance, reducing the representation, disturbing the interpretation, escaping the illustration and liberating the figure: sticking to the facts.*

-23- Further analysis: **Artistic practice.**

The Code: Chapter 2, Artistic Practice:

1+1=2 (or) 1+1= possibilities

The inspiration of ‘Chan’ project comes from a Chinese novel, a controversial book called ‘Three Inch Golden Lotus’. It tells the story of the head of the Tong family, a noted antiques dealer, who has a special interest in perfectly bound feet. This interest is shared by Tong’s like-minded friends and together these men debate the history of foot-binding, argue its finer points, and hold contests to determine the smallest feet in various families. When Tong glimpses the exquisite feet of Fragrant Lotus, a girl of humble origins whose feet had been bound - the process is graphically described - by her grandmother to assure a good marriage, he marries her to one of his loutish sons. Her arrival in the household provokes jealousies as the women scheme to display their own feet and win Tong’s praises. As years pass Fragrant Lotus, now the family head, finds herself defending tradition as she battles the Natural Foot Society, led by the beautiful Pretty Flower. A superficially whimsical and picaresque tale of old Chinese society, luminously evoked, but with a deadly serious underlying subject that gives it a sobering edge. After reading the story, I questioned whether I had ever met a woman with bound feet or not? Which led me to wonder whether they are they still alive? The curiosity drove me to produce ‘Chan’ project.

-Video-

The first experiment of the ‘Chan’ project is two channel (Figure 9), which are based on my subjective imagination and research into what foot-binding really involves. Despite my interest in this dying Chinese custom, I have never a woman who possesses the three inch feet. For the sake of more accurate research, I tried to find records of this phenomenon in Chinese archives. The challenge has to do with how to convert and present distinctive aspects into representation. I am afraid of visual practice becoming illustrations of archives and references. Narrative language is not convince me to explore project. The state of materialization could be assistance of grasping the conception, so experimental might be assisted in a way physically and psychologically

to comprehend this custom. I tend to experience a binding process by myself at the beginning.

I found a precise description in the novel ‘Three Inch Golden Lotus’, Fen Jicai wrote a bloody process of foot-binding:

‘A pair of red crested, white-feathered roosters-from who knew where- lay flopping helplessly on the ground. Their rough, fingerlike legs were tied with twine. What did roosters have to do with foot-binding? In the middle of courtyard a whole set of things was laid out: a small table, some stools, a cleaver, a pair of scissors, a jar of alum, a jar of sugar, a kettle, some cotton, and some rags. The starched foot-binding bandages lay coiled in neat rolls on the table. On the front of Granny’s coat were pinned a few huge needles normally used for sewing quilts; from the needles’ eyes trailed lengths of white cotton thread...Granny grabbed Fragrant Lotus’ feet and pressed them-first one, then the other-into the roosters’ stomachs. The hot, burning, sticky sensations and convulsions of the dying roosters...Granny relaxed her grip and pulled out Fragrant Lotus’ feet. The roosters’ blood flowed freely and her feet were covered with it, scarlet and sticky. She pulled over a wooden basin, washed and dried her granddaughter’s feet, and placed them on her knees. The binding was to begin. Granny grabbed

her feet- first the right and then the left. She left the big toe alone, and she pressed the other four toes downward and back, at a slight angle, toward the arch. With a muted crack, the bones in the toes broke and gave way. Granny had already shaken loose a roll of bandage and tied the four toes securely down. She wrapped the bandage around the four toes, down to the arch, up over the instep, behind the heel, and then quickly forward, over four toes once again. On the next round, when the bandage came over the toes and back toward in instep, she gave it a sharp tug toward the heel so the four toes bent even more downward towards the sole...'

An extremely violent and astounding description of foot-binding. People cannot believe that such a horrible procedure occurred between grandmother and grandchild, such a satire. Some preparations for foot-binding appear to be partly ceremonial, for example the rooster sacrifice.. Feng Jicai did not depict the reaction and experience of Fragrant Lotus, but reader can associate a torturing pain with the part of rooster and grandmother. The key words which I produce from this chapter become a cursory sketch to assist following the performance: *ceremony, red, violence, silence*.

I simulated and recorded the binding process, an unauthentic imitation. The elements that play a fundamental role in my performance are *spotlight, silence, roses, small-mouthed bottle, cotton list*. The movement is also significant: *toes downward, treading on roses, squash and*. The composition of the metaphorical materials can be interpreted as the process of foot-binding in my subjective demonstration. The symbolic performance of binding my feet, treading on roses and

squashing are full of narrative visual languages, yet I have no interest in displaying the illustration of my artistic practice due to the limited representation. I mentioned in my artist statement above, the 'distance' which I want to reduce and shrink in order to create 'intimacy'. Language is a signifier to present the thoughts and sentiments of writers, but images seem to translate can be more disengaged.

To be able to achieve an 'intimacy'. Therefore I manipulated fragments of whole performance and deconstructed it by two channels (showing back to back), which is able to shrinking the distance, reducing the representation, disturbing the interpretation, escaping the illustration and liberating the figure: to stick to the fact.

-Photo installations-

Photo installations, thirteen portraits and thirteen split Chinese strokes with LED light boxes. The visual installation involved my research of the concept of sign (code), deconstruction and reconstruction. In the practical execution, I tend to question the basics as part of my research. Research that focuses on finding a kind of material trace, an image or sound can shrink the distance. The analysis of painting and photography might not be based on their historical combinations, but my research method which is represented by my practical observations and experiments to be able to understand how is it constructed and how is it perceived.

In November 2011, I went back China to do my foot-binding research. I was shocked to find so many women with bound feet who were over ninety years old still alive in northern China. I interviewed and photographed over 40 women with bound feet in the countryside of my father's hometown, Zhuang He. Unlike my parents, I had never met a woman with bound feet before I began my research. During the time when I was born in the 1980s, China had already gone through many societal changes, for instance new laws concerning compulsory education and one child policy, the development of the economy, etc. These social issues are all a form of transformation, the way that people look

at their immediate daily lives. There are few people who care about a dying custom like foot-binding. The women with bound feet are a trend of the past and have become 'invisible' history.

In China, Beijing and Shanghai are characteristic of typical international cities full of entertainment, skyscrapers, assisted-living facilities, etc. Life in the countryside, however, is often perceived as being inaccessible, in part due to traffic inconvenience, lower education, impoverished resources, etc. Before I started this research, like most people I was also aware of these snapshots of poverty and hopelessness in rural China. However, during a lengthy interview, one of the women with bound feet defogged the some of the misconceptions and my previously opinions. Below is an interview between myself and one of the women with bound feet whom I used as a reference used in my method.

'M' represents myself and L, Lu Shi.

Name: Lu Shi(吕氏)²⁴
Old: 96

M: Do you remember when your feet were bound, and who did that?

L: About 7 or 8 years old, I can't remember precisely when. But older is not good for binding, because your bone are going to be very stiff and can't be bound into a good shape. Who did that?...en... the elder, who must have a nice technique.

M: Do you still remember the process of binding?

L: Yes, of course, it is torturous. The

⁻²⁴⁻ Lu Shi, typical Chinese woman's name in late imperial China. 'Lu' is the family name of her husband, 'Shi' means surname in general. For instance, Li Shi, Zhang Shi, He Shi, etc.

list is about 10 centimeters wide, the elder was pressing my four toes, without the big toe, downward and back and binding my feet with the linen list very quickly. I still remember the burning pain after the binding in the middle of night. In order to sleep I put my feet on the windowsill instead of a blanket. My bones were broken, and feet throbbed from the infected cut. One year or even longer, after treating the pus, namely can swell dras back the pus, rapid cicatrization.

M: Can you do farm work or housework after foot-binding?

L: I can't chop wood, carry water. My husband did most of the heavy work. But I can cook and do some housework, cleaning, washing, something like that.

M: When you were young, do you have some extra works to earn money, like an office lady today?

L: No, we do farming, so everybody has the capacity to be self-sufficient in the country. I was uneducated, so I can't read and write. I am a housewife.

M: How many children you have? And what's their job?

L: I have 5 children, three sons and two daughters. They all treat us with filial respect. My second son is working on the railroad and first son is self-employed and has a small industrial company. I am very happy what I have now. My great grandson comes to visit almost every week and take care of us. I shouldn't complain about anything.

M: The quality of your life has been greatly improved, and is worlds apart from that in the past. Do you have something remarkable in the memory.

L: I went through very difficult life, 60 years ago. There were no clothes, blanket, food in my hometown (Shan Dong Province). After moving to Liao Ning (before the cultural revolution), everything got better. We could have food in the dining hall (Mao's policy: eating, sharing resources together to achieve a 'communism'). Men came out to build a reservoir and dig dikes. In my hometown, we have nothing to eat except peanuts and sweet potato. I have never missed my hometown or gone back.

The living conditions of Lu Shi were the average among the forty-two interviews of women with bound feet. There were exceptions to the norm that were either worse or better, but most women were unexpectedly satisfied with their lives. Once I finished the collection, I went back to Helsinki to start my practice. At the beginning, I analyzed the references and tried to create a logical chain through the disjointed chaos. During the research I experimented with the possibility of different materials in order to trace a convincing system and rules to represent my concept.

TEST1: The composition of artificial landscape and portrait (Figure 10)

I printed an artificial landscape of Beijing which was photographed in 2011, and projected the women's portraits individually onto the landscape photograph. The women's portrait became transparent against the city landscape. When the portrait appears on the photograph, viewers

will mostly see the landscape due to projector's exposure.

The idea behind this test was very simple, I wanted to transport the women to a typical big city, to somewhere they have never been before and likely will not be able to visit in their lifetime. However, while the visual result was very interesting, the concept was not compelling. This projecting test simplified the complex custom of foot-binding, which was not my purpose at all. How then to produce the sense of chaos within the background of the image through my research practice. Next, I explored another material, a structuralist material.

TEST2: Knitting (Figure 11,12,13)

Knitting is a structuralist process, in a way from a yarn to a sample involved with knitting machine and composition of sequencing. I chose red yarn with which I knitted a simple sample pattern. The repetition of the knitting process greatly attract me, because I found a similarity of repetition from photography and scanner. So I went back to image and scanned the sample and printed it on a thick fine-art paper. However, I still could not relate the knitting process to foot-binding. Perhaps, if the usage of the material itself is based on a system, then I could focus on an action that interposes and interacts with the system. I tried breaking the intersections of knitting samples by needle. In the process of repetition and deconstruction I made a trace with which I could develop the concept even further. Nonetheless, It remained too abstract to make a connection between knitted fabric and foot-binding. I realized that I should choose more closely related materials, which in this case became photography and drawing.

TEST3: Painting and Sewing (Figure 14,15,16)

As I have mentioned previously, rules and system are significant to me. Represent this complex issue in my art would require structural and systematic material. While the concepts of deconstruction and reconstruction are key, I was still unsure how to combine the materials in the best way to convey my concept. After experiments with knitting and

projecting, I went back to the image to experiment with painting and photography, both of which I am versed in.

I do believe art work has many possibilities instead of just one way in which to interpretate them, neither just scientific research or mathematical result. I think this notion has guided me towards the concept of the ‘sign’, a symbolic sign.

Therefore, I chose the perfect pattern, a circle. Circles have important significance for Chinese culture. This is expressed by the idea that everyone needs a ‘circle’ life, a happy ending, yuan 圆(circle) is the same character that is used in yuan man 圆满(perfect, satisfactory, successful, fulfilling). Women with bound feet also desire a circular life, as most people do in China. My drawing was therefore restricted to the circular pattern in keeping with the closed circular form. The reason, why I tend to cover the identities of bound feet women is that portraits is not only an illustration of who they are, but an icon of bound feet women, a group, a history. This is what I try to perceive. From sewing substitution, I am aware the problem of a better looking which cannot assist to produce the project. So I went to next step, a Chinese character.

Final result (Figure 18-21)

After my various experiments, I found a system of rules based on the Chinese character ‘chan’ 缠(binding) which is formed by thirteen strokes. Following these rules²⁵, I made thirteen portraits each with a circle pattern based on one of the thirteen strokes that form the word

⁻²⁵⁻ **Chinese characters**, evolved over time from earlier forms of hieroglyphs. The idea that all Chinese characters are either pictographs or ideographs is erroneous: most characters contain phonetic parts, and are composites of phonetic components and semantic radicals. Only the simplest characters, such as ren 人(human), ri 日(sun), shan 山(mountain, hill), shui 水(water), may be wholly pictorial in origin. And, at the first glance, Hanzi BiShun- 汉字笔顺(rules of writing) seems quite complicated, in the eyes of westerners, it more looks like a painting. In fact it is rule-based. For instance, a horizontal stroke precedes a vertical stroke or downward either to left or to the right. and a downward stroke to the left precedes one to the right. People regard the process of writing characters as a mental therapy, which you can look forward late imperial- ‘calligraphy’.

‘chan’. By repetition of writing an individual stroke I constructed the circle pattern. The composition of painting and photo with LED light box is the final way to present this installations.

This combination of Chinese characters and portraits involved the question I mentioned above. A structure and rule based material was deconstructed and reconstructed. By transforming a meaningful character of the Chinese language into a symbolic sign (code), which can not be understood by one fluent in Chinese, I effectively reduced the narrative. This enabled the image to shrinking the distance and finally achieve an ‘intimacy’.

-Wood Installation-

After recoding a Chinese character, my research method became clearer. The wood installations represent the interviews (voice record) of the women with bound. I used two materials to explore my practice: wood boxes and epoxy resin. The wood box was a method used to collect archives in late imperial China. For this reason, I regarded this as an interview ‘container’ in which to present a dying custom.

Epoxy resin is a fascinating material, whose key features include transparency, flexibility, toughness and easy to handle. I wrote down each women’s interview with epoxy resin in the wood box. When completed, I presented the boxes as a three dimension ‘installation’ of the interviews (Figure 22-24). Each interview was related an individual photo installation.

The interview is conceptualized as being frozen in a wooden box that cannot be interpreted or understood even by a Chinese person. A concept that is shared with photo installation. Spectator view an ‘image’ instead of a narrative story. The decoding and recoding process evolved my research method and experiment.

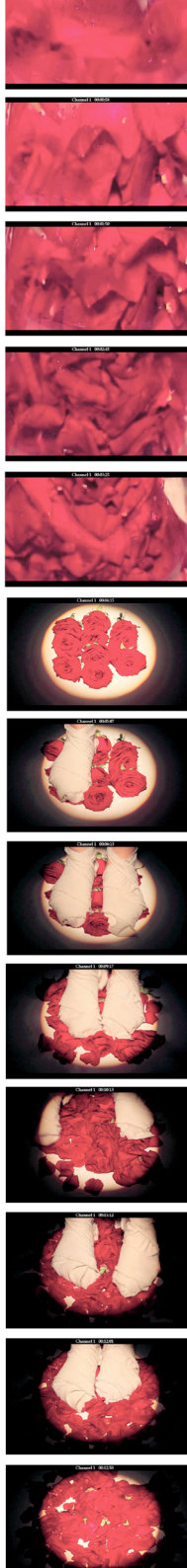
Shrinking the distance, reducing the representation, disturbing the interpretation, escaping the illustration and liberating the figure: to stick to the fact.

I am interested in how to visualize the difference between them in order to understand how meaning is constructed and how is it perceived.

A transformation of deconstructing those symbolic materials to be a code which contains the sophisticated phenomenon behind this dying custom and in order to block the narrative and limited communication to perceive the possibilities. For me, nothing can be simplified, the possibilities are not only a representation of artwork, but also a thing to themselves.

$1+1=2?$ (or) $1+1=$ **Possibilities** ?

-Channel 1-



-Channel 2-

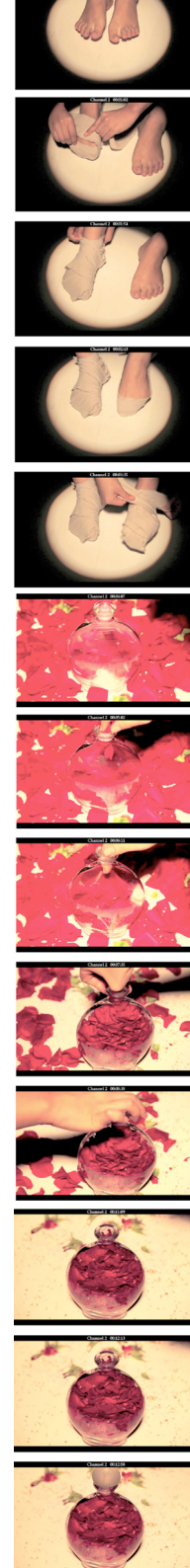


Figure 9:
'Chan', Two channel video.
13Mins. 2011

Figure 10:
'Tser I', Bound feet woman with City landscape(Beijing).
Digital print, projector. **2011**



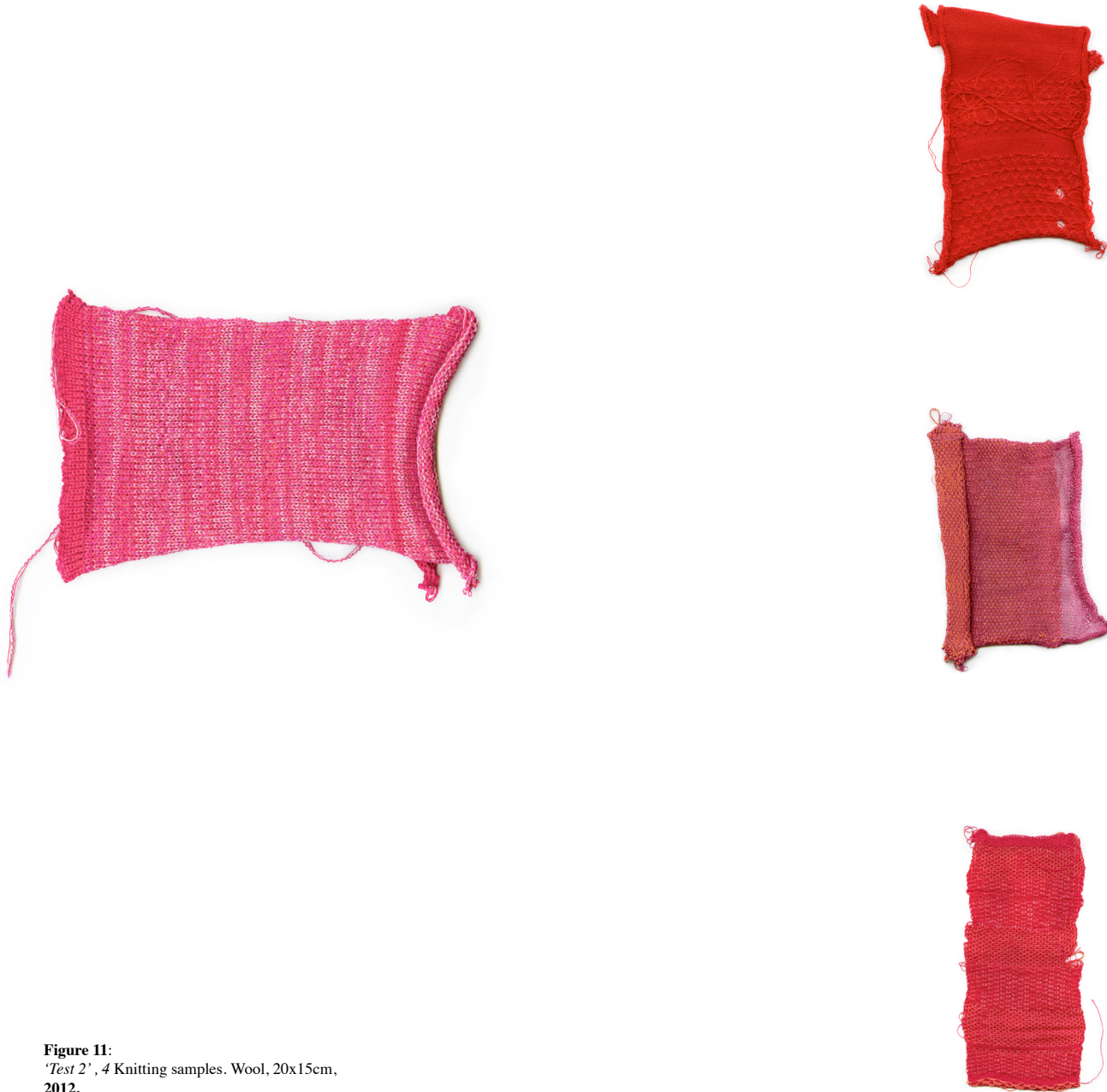


Figure 11:
'Test 2', 4 Knitting samples. Wool, 20x15cm,
2012.



Figure 12:
'Test 2', Knitting samples with holes. Fine art paper,
21x30cm, 2012.

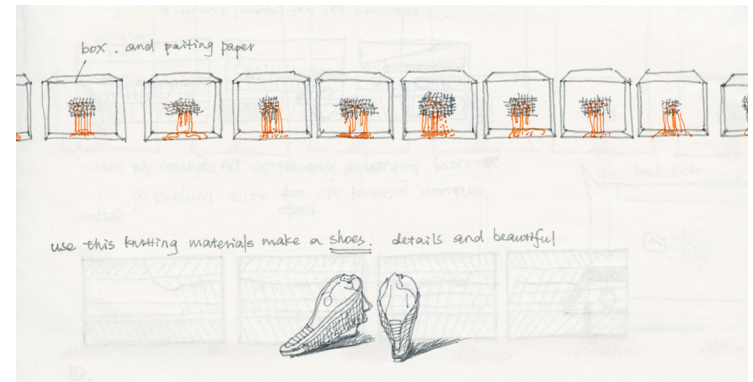
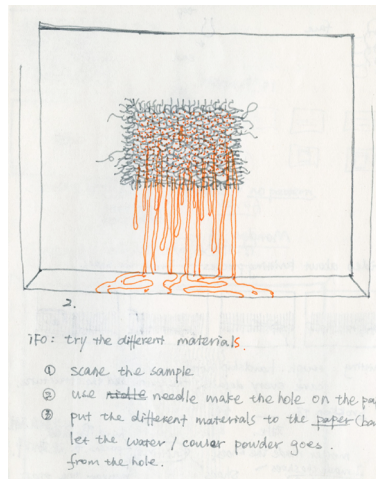


Figure 13:
'Test 2', Sketch drawing of showing knitting
samples with holes. **2012.**

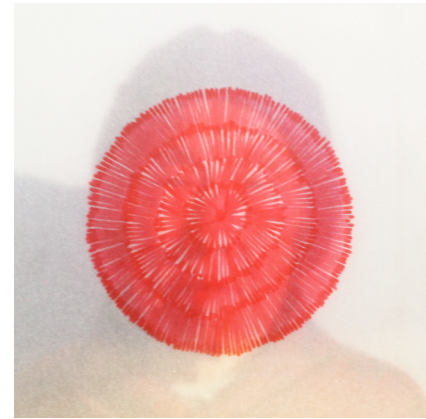


Figure 14:
'Test 3', Sketch drawing of
circle, Parchment paper and
red water ink, **2012.**

Figure 15:
'Test 3', Sketch drawing of circle, Parchment
paper and red water ink, 18x23cm, **2012**.



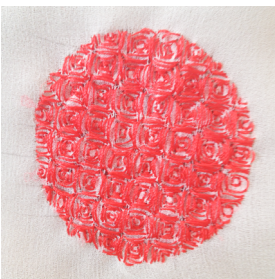


Figure 16:
'Test 3', sewing circle
 pattern. 5 samples,
 Silk, 8x8cm,
2012.



Figure 17:
'Chan', Chinese
character.

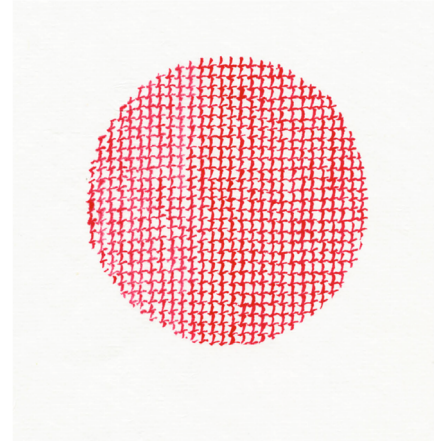


Figure 18:
'Chan', Drawing detail, Oriental paper and
Chinese painting pigment. **2012**

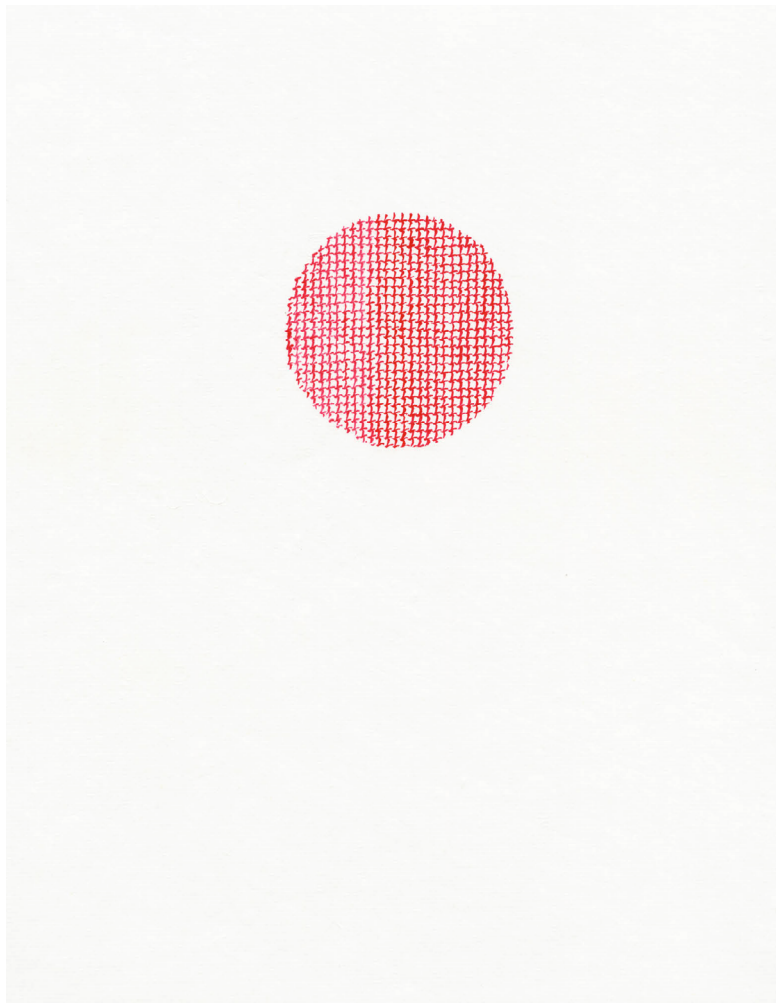


Figure 19:
'Chan', 24cm X 30cm, Oriental paper with Wood light box
(LED light turn off), 2012.

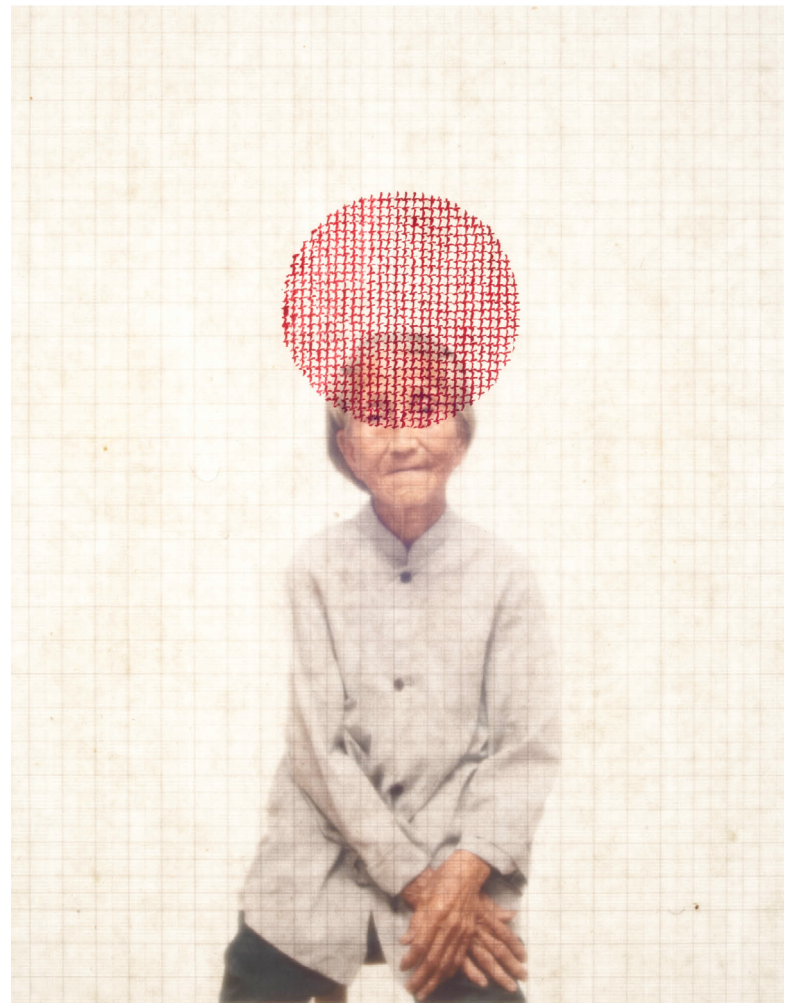


Figure 20:
'Chan', 24cm X 30cm, Oriental paper with Wood light box
(LED light turn on), 2012.



Figure 21:
'Chan',
2012.



Figure 22:
3D Drawing detail, Wood with Epoxy
Resin, 2012



Figure 23:
'Chan', 15.5cm x 22cm x 6.5cm, Wood Installation with
Epoxy Resin, 2012.

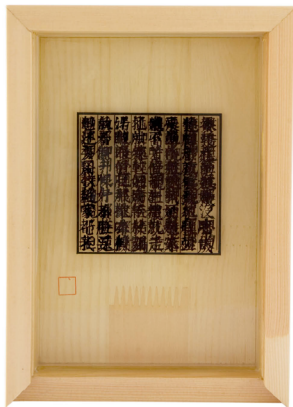


Figure 24:
4 example, Wood Instalation with Epoxy
Resin, 2012.

The Code: Chapter 2, Materiality:

materiality is how art's material qualities are sensed, interpreted and understood.

I enjoy the use of some tactile materials, for instance unlike a technical program, physical materials are more realistic and malleable. Exploring different materials takes on a systematical procedure, in a way that logically develops, step by step. How to perceive or combine the concept with the context of each material is a fundamental question with which I construct and demonstrate my practice as an artist. For this reason, I have produced artwork with systems and rules that are based in a structure-centric material. For instance, the strict structure of Chinese characters and the rules for writing them. By extension, decoding and recoding a meaningful Chinese character to be an unrecognizable sign represents the marriage of my perception and materiality. Again, I am interested in how to visualize the difference between them in order to understand how meaning is constructed and how it is perceived.

In a contemporary context, materiality is particularly relevant in that contemporary art is understood to be a relic of the artist's process of investigation into the nature of things. The conveyance of objects' materiality and artists' work reframes meaning through aesthetic juxtaposition.

Contemporary art become a symbolic representation of culture ethos. For instance, post-modern perspectives leaned away from notion of strict hierarchies and became more inclusive, for example of ordinary people's perception of the world. Art engages our senses via materiality. In this way, works of art provide a much needed anchor during what could be described as an age of disembodiment, the digital age. Contrary to what one might presume the result would be of digitization of media - the devaluing of works of art in all its forms -, this moment in history provides an example of importance of art's material qualities in our lives.

Heidegger suggests that art has the potential to activate the imagination and that imaginative realms can transcend materiality:

'A work, by being a work, makes space for that spaciousness. 'To make space for' means here especially to liberate the Open and to establish it in its structure. This in-stalling occurs through the erecting mentioned earlier. The work as work sets up a world. The work holds open the Open of the world.' ²⁶

Therefore, materiality, which I discuss below might not be a theoretical and historical analysis. These materials have influenced my perception and research method, which ultimately led me to question how best to use materials in order to demonstrate various possibilities of representation (an artwork).

In short, *materiality, as an aesthetic concept, has evolved out of formalism's interest in the purely visual aspects of art and structuralism's interest in context and communication.* Artist Eva Hesse, Agnes Martin, Sigmar Polk, Gerhard Richter have influenced my art practice a lot.

-26-, **Martin Heidegger. 'Poetry, Language, Thought'**. Albert Hofstadter, trans. New York, New York. Harper collins Publishers. 1971, **PP, 19-25.**

The Code: Chapter 2, Materiality:

2.1, Image & Photograph

Photograph- denotes a physical object.
Image- denotes a memory, ideal, idea,
 or notion of a picture.

‘I perceive the referent (here, the
 photograph really transcends itself:
 is this not the sole proof of its art?
 To annihilate itself as medium, to be
 no longer a sign but the thing itself?).’²⁶

A seminar led by Jacqueline Lichtenstein: ‘on and around subject of image, photograph, and painting. The relation of painting to the other two terms was problematic and unresolved. To some people, it seemed best to speak about painting as an historically specific practice, associated with the last five centuries in the West. In that way of thing, painting has become increasingly marginal, and is not appropriate as an exemplar for images as a whole. But in one point, a painting is central example of an image, and the discourse on painting has intimately informed the theorization of images from the middle ages onward. As a scholar of eighteenth and nineteenth century painting, I have a special interest in painting as a way to think about both photograph and images, and also have an interest in what make paintings different from other kinds of photographs and from disembodied image.’²⁷

Lichtenstein further argues that if we consider texts on painting produced by art history, very few are on what she would consider painting: the textures, colors, and lines. At this point, material itself (texture, colour, perspective) transcends the artist’s practice and concept. For instance, Jorma Puranen, who photographed master faces on oil paintings (Figure 25), blurred the identity and became a ‘material object’.

-26-, **Rolan Barthes**, ‘Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography’ (1981), Hill and Wang: New York, PP.45.

-27-, ‘On Some Limits of Materiality in Art History,’ **James Elkins**, *Das Magazin des Instituts für Theorie*[Zürich] 12 (2008): PP. 25–30. Special issue Taktilität: Sinneserfahrung als Grenzerfahrung, edited by Stefan Neuner and Julia Gelshorn.

The composition of photography, painting and flash light represent the concept of time, materiality and space. It became two, three and four dimensional object, the same as a book.

Olkowski’s suggest of photography that ‘What is created, what is thought is no longer a sign within a symbolic system but becomes the thing itself’²⁸. I propose that the force of the work of art can, in Olkowski’s terms, become more than the medium that bears it, so that it can transcend its structure as representation and a sign. Matter is transformed in the exchange between objects, bodies and images.

In my ‘Chan’ project, I combined painting and photography together. As Olkiwski’s notion, a ‘sign’, which has become a significant concern in my practice. Even art history has argues in favor of and demonstrated the combination of painting and photography. However, I regard them as one, a mixed ‘sign’ (code) in the project which present my practice of de- and reconstruction in order to produce my perceptions and concepts. Repetition of the ‘sign’, which constructs the non-hierarchical composition is intended to allow access to the images in ways that is not predetermined.

Throughout the thirteen photo installations the other relationship between painting and photography with which I concerned myself, was that photography is a tool to document objective reality, and painting is my artificial (subjective) feedback of realistic world. In this aspect, Richter’s approach truly influenced my thoughts and practice. He argues, in his Notes, 1964-1965:

‘The photograph has an abstraction of its own, which is not easy to see through...The photograph took the place of all those paintings, drawings and illustrations that served to provide information about reality that they represented. A photograph does this more reliably and credibly than any painting.

-28-, **Dorothea Olkowski**, ‘Gilles Deleuze and the Ruin of Representation’, 1999, University of California Pree. PP. 208

It is the only picture that tells the absolute truth, because it see ; objectively'. It usually gets believed, even where it is technically faulty and the content is barely identifiable. At the same time, photography took on a religious function...Photography altered ways of seeing and thinking. Photographs were regarded as true, paintings as artificial. The painted picture was no longer credible: its representation froze into immobility, because it was not authentic but invented.²⁹

Furthermore, according to Adorno's aesthetic³⁰, one that immediately follows from this critique of the reflection theory, proclaims that art shows a double nature: on the one hand, it is autonomous; on the other hand, it represents a social fact. The work of art can only bring about a relative autonomy, since artworks respond to issues that are coming from the outside world and are thus related to the social context. The work of art is no simple reflection of reality. Adorno refuses to define his concepts because he believes they specify themselves in relation to one another. Philosophy cannot operate in a straightforward manner, as mathematics does. The part, not only from the whole; but the whole also forms the parts. It is impossible to understand each part on its own. The dialectic approach does share some similarity with Chinese philosophy, instead of One specific definition, but prefer many Possibilities. However, life communicates itself to us through conven-

tion and through the parlour games and laws of social life. Photographs are ephemeral images of this communication- as the circle 'sign' that I painted on photographs. Being painted and deconstructed, they no longer tell of specific situation, and the representation becomes absurd. As a painting, it changes both its meaning and its information content.

To Richter, the photograph reproduces objects in a different way from the painted picture, because the camera does not apprehend objects: it sees them. In freehand drawing, the object is apprehended in all its parts, dimensions, proportions, geometric forms. These components art noted down as signs and can be read of as a coherent whole. This is an abstraction that distorts reality and leads to stylization of a specific kind. By tracing the outlines with the aid of projector, you can bypass this elaborate process of apprehension. You no longer apprehend but see and make(without design) what you have not apprehended. And when you do not know what you are making, you do not know, either, what to alter or distort. Your apprehension that an arm is so wide, so long and so heavy is not only unimportant: it becomes a fraud, if it leads you to believe that you have truly apprehended that arm.

⁻²⁹⁻, Gerhard Richter, 'TEXT- Writings, Interviews and letters 1961-2007', edited by Dietmar Elger and Hans Ulrich Obrist. First published in United Kingdom in 2009 by Thames & Hudson Ltd, 181A High Holborn, London WC1V 7QX. PP. 29-30.
⁻³⁰⁻, Theodor Adorno, 'Aesthetic theory', edited by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, London/ New York: Continuum, 1984(Originally published by Seabury Press in 1973)

The Code: Chapter 2, Materiality:

2.2, Sign-(Code)

Semiotic analysis focuses not on the use of signs but on the underlying structure, the system or competence that enables the producing and interpreting of signs. It always concerns the deep structure, not the superficial differences between individual users.³¹

According to Saussure's notion, Van den Braembussche made a distinction between Signifiant and Signifié. He argues, the sign always consists of two elements-signifier and signified. For instance: the word 'state' first of all consists of the signifier 'state', which comprises various letters in a specific order. This is material manifestation, the pure form. To this signifier, one can attribute a meaning(signified). As the sentence 'The state of the highways is alarming'. Together, the signifier(sa) and signified(se) constitute the world-sign 'state'. Each sign is associated with a separate signifier and signified. The relationship between signifier and signified, between (sa) and (se), is arbitrary. Despite their arbitrary nature, we are able to understand word-sign because they are based on conventions or agreements which presuppose a competence in or familiarity with the language in question.

Furthermore, an example of the French translation of the word 'cheese'-fromage. If we do not know French, if we are not familiar with it and not competent in the language at all, we will not understand that the word 'fromage' means the same as the English word 'cheese'. In this case, we only perceive its pure form or signifier, the letters f-r-o-m-a-g-e. Even if we can reproduce the pure acoustic image of the word, we will still fail to understand what we are pronouncing. The word would function as a word-sign enabling communication. We would then be able to 'Decode' the meaning of the world

A sign consisting of a signifier and a signified always refers to something else, for example, to something that happens or exists in reality(deeper meaning). And the hidden meaning is often the true meaning or content of the sign. According to Roland Barthes, the rose, as a flower, is beautiful. But 'a bouquet of roses to my lover', in order to become a token of my love, the sign in turn has to become a signifier onto which a 'further meaning' (second layer) can be grafted. It means that these roses signify my love. Barthes argues: 'It is as true to say that on the plane of experience I cannot dissociate the roses from the message they carry, as to say that on the plane of analysis I cannot confuse the roses as signifier with the roses as sign: the signifier is empty, the sign is full, it is meaning' ³²

'Semioticians are confronted with sign systems that require them to determine their hidden rules. These rules will have to be determined by means of structural analysis, which can only be achieved in a roundabout way. Therefore, semiotic inquirers generally begin by constructing a model that serves map the expected deeper principle...an important characteristic of structure analysis that researchers are convinced that the underlying structures they discover are as real as - or even more real than- what is actually observed' ³³

-31-, Antoon Van den Braembussche 'Thinking Art', Springer Science, Business Media B.V, 2009. 1994(First Edition). 2006(Fourth Edition). PP,229.

-32-, Roland Barthes, 'The semiotic challenge', Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994(Originally published in 1988). Important English anthology of the semiotic writings of Barthes.

-33-, Susan Sontag(Ed.), 'A Roland Barthes reader', London: Vintage, 2000(Originally published in 1982). With an insightful introduction by Susan Sontag, this is surely the best reader available in English. It contains a fine and relevant collection of Barthes' writings over a period of three decades.

However, if a sign was decomposed in a way that the signifier changes form and signified cannot represent the original meaning, the manifest and inferred level are reduced. What will happen next? Does it construct a new system that can also be interpreted and understood or will it evolve into meaningless 'image-sign'.

This question has to do with my practice of de- and reconstruction. A language contains a mutual system as sign (signifier and signified). Deconstructing a meaningful sign blocks the communication of the narrative interpretation, and becomes a CODE. By extension, in the 'Chan' project, deconstructing Chinese characters to be represented visually as a code which contains the sophisticated phenomenon behind foot-binding is able to transcend the simplified definition of the dying custom and is perceived as various possibilities. To me, nothing can be simplified, the possibilities are manifest not only as a representation of artwork, but also its very existence.

In art practice, Barthes argues, the tools of mythical speech(writing, photography, painting, posters, rites, objects, etc) are reduced to pure signifiers as soon as the 'myth' incorporates them for its own purpose: for the myth, these tools are no more than raw materials. The cunning of myth is thus that it uses-or abuses-an original sign to signify something(completely) different. And the myth adds a second meaning, or rather: it creates a whole new meaning, feeding on the first like a parasite, leaving it bereft and eroded.³⁵

⁻³⁵⁻, Roland Barthes, 'Mythologies', London: Vintage, 2000(Originally published in 1972).This explains why Barthes emphasizes that the myth works two ways: on the one side, it points out, on the other side it makes us understand something and imposes a specific point of view. This is nothing but connotation.

The Code: Chapter 2, Materiality:

2.3, Deconstruction-(Language)

‘A foreigner in his language: he does not mix another language with his, he shapes and sculpts a foreign language that does not preexist within his own language...The point is to make language itself cry, to make it stutter, mumble or even whisper’ ³⁶

Cezanne’s attempts to realise his “little sensations” exemplifies the state of affairs where the artist becomes a foreigner in her or his own language. Merleau-Ponty asserts that Cezanne wanted to see as a newborn in order to paint perception itself. In his efforts to do this, Cezanne put himself in order to paint perception itself. In his efforts to do this, Cezanne put himself in the position of being a foreigner in the language of paint. Merleau-Ponty suggests that, in abandoning himself to the ‘chaos of sensation’, Cezanne continually re-invented the language of painting. He was always working as a stranger in the language of paint and his efforts produced those little sensations as material presence. Cezanne’s working method was paradoxical. Merleau-Ponty observes that:

He was pursuing reality without giving up the sensuous surface, with no other guide than the immediate impression of nature, without following the contours, with no outline to enclose the colour, with no perspectival or pictorial arrangement. This is what Bernard called Cezanne’s suicide: aiming for reality while deny himself the means to attain it.³⁷

Referring to Cezanne’s *Man with Crossed Arms* he says the more a painting pretends to represent reality (Figure 26), the more he is struck

-36-, Gilles Deleuze, ‘Gilles Deleuze and the Theater of Philosophy’, Edited by Constantin V. Boundas and Dorothea Olkowski, (First edition 1994) New York: Routledge: PP. 23-28. Deleuze is particularly concerned with how the writer achieves this transfiguration in language. According to him, such a movement is molecular. Where language begins to stutter, the writer becomes (above).

-37-, Barbara Bolt, ‘Art Beyond Representation: The performative Power of the Image’ I.B.Tauris&CoLtd. 2004, PP.162.

by elements which at first glance do not resemble the signs themselves of particular object or thing, but which may in fact lead him to recreate the original seeing of that thing.³⁸

Materiality produces the visual stutter which disrupts visual language and visual narrative. Yet, matter’s insistence does not only include the materiality of medium, but also includes the matter of artist in a graphic performativity and the matter of thing itself. In the ‘Chan’ project, spectators received a graphic performativity without hierarchies and distance. The composition of the deconstructed Chinese character and women’s portraits block communication, yet viewer and art works bridge that gap by a level of intimacy which enables them to communicate without boundaries (narrative language). Language becomes an abstract image, code and visual stutter.

Either way, if we concern the same language system, misunderstanding and distance still exist. Braembussche based on Derrida’s approach of deconstruction implies a radical critique of representation to suggest:

‘In the written word, the order of signifier, the signifiant rules. Here the exterior and palpable manifestation of the sign predominates: the bodily supplement. Because of logocentrism, we are deeply suspicious of the written word. Writing is deemed to be dangerous, because the writer in principle loses every control over text. Even after his death, readers still use and misuse his written words. The written word was therefore already seen by Plato as the prodigal son who goes his own way straying from

-38-, Alberto Giacometti, “Ecrits”(in English: Writings), presented by Michel Leiris and Jacques Dupin, Paris: Hermann, 1990. PP. 69.

the father or origin, or more concretely, from the original intention of author. One can cite at will from a written text and, in this way, violate the original meaning.’³⁹

We use a sign to refer to something that is not present. The sign is always a means, a substitute for something else. In this sense, it is considered literally as re-presentation: it renders something absent present again.

In Derrida’s approach. Deconstruction which I understood is not a criticism of specific reference(text, image, music,etc), though it implies a general critique of mimesis or representation, as well shall see. It is also not directed at unveiling the deeper sense of reference, as is the case in hermeneutic approach. It is instead of a therapeutic nature. It traces the aporias, blind spots, or moments of self-contradiction whereby a reference involuntarily betrays the tension between what it wants to say manifestly and what is nonetheless is bound to betray. It all comes down to revealing the tension between what the reference history says, the rhetoric, and what it does say and yet what is very significant, its logic. And the more spectators pretend to translate artwork, the more they are struck by elements which at first glance do not resemble the signs themselves of a particular object or thing, but which may in fact lead him to recreate the original seeing of the work, the possibility.

An overarching theme is to encourage trusting one’s own eyes when we look at the world, to doubt one’s prejudices, but to trust one’s instincts about the validity of an idea. You don’t need hierarchies to decide what is acceptable, permissible, or beautiful. The possibility to appropriate the world around you with your own eyes is freely available to everybody. Once you have trained yourself in that, it is easier to recognize and resist manipulation and still be open to new ideas. We are always free to see what we want in the world.

The Code: Chapter 2, Materiality:

2.3, Imitation & Reproduction

What is representation?

Plato answered in ‘The Republic’⁴⁰. The following is a schematic representation.

Ideal World	Perceptible World	Art
Ideal forms	Phenomena	Artifacts works of art
	Spoken word	Writing
Authentic truth	Imperfect imitation	Imitation of imitation

According to Plato, the phenomena that we call ‘nature’, ‘experience’ and ‘reality’ belong to the world of appearances, the world of phenomenal. The world, as we perceive it, is in constant flux, he argued. We never perceive the same object in the same manner twice. The objects we perceive the point of view from which we perceive them, and even the perceiver, are all subject to constant change, and yet we identify similar objects in all our perceptions. And he suggest, we must assume that there is, next to the perceptible world, an ideal world, which contains the absolute forms, of which the perceptible objects and/or acts are but imperfect manifestations or reflections. This world of forms is the true, actual and authentic reality, for it is eternal and unchanging(Ideal world).

After that, Plato categorized the difference between craftsman and imitative art⁴¹, he thinks that imitative arts do not produce anything or do not contribute anything to the world, that they are useless. He was acutely aware of the illusionary nature of image. And so he distinguished two important aspects of ‘mimesis’, or imitation: first, the artist creates an image of sensibly perceptible reality, and second, this image

is unreal.

However, imitation is an usual and efficient way for everyone to initially and recognize the world. As a living example of the problem of imitation, Giacometti is even more interesting because even at a young age he copies works of art, an activity that world continue for the rest of his life. He copies paintings and sculptures incessantly, often inspired by reproductions he happened to have on hand. With these imitations of imitations, he attempted incessantly to immerse himself in the art of the past. But copying, moreover, was also a way of committing works of art from the past to memory, of comparing them with each other and discovering why they so clearly resemble reality. Pictorial imitation also changes our view of objects itself.

My earlier education experience, also involved the method of ‘imitations of imitations’. Transparent material is the most fascinating copy-material I have been interested in. Since I was in the kindergarten, the first material I used to write Chinese characters was ‘parchment paper’. I copied the master calligraphy on parchment paper in order to improve my writing technique. Transparent material can assist beginners in a very concrete manner to imitate master pieces. Yet through the countless copies I made, I knew that one never sees things virginally, that a style, concept or convention always colors them. Imitation always means that there is a distinction, a difference, between the work of art and reality. Learning and practicing Chinese calligraphy affected my later art making. I still remember the paper copies which I did during quiet moments to myself at my childhood house, as a physical and mental exercise. Chinese regard calligraphy as a part of art on par with the aesthetics of oriental painting and ceramic crafts.

Gombrich argues that painting is an activity, and the artist will therefore tend to see what he pains rather than to paint what he sees⁴². Braembussche’s notion of Gombrich approach suggest: ‘Every rep-

⁻⁴⁰⁻, Plato(428-348 BC), ‘The republic’, translated by Robin Waterfield, Oxford/New York: in Oxford University Press, 2008.(Originally published in 1994).

⁻⁴¹⁻, According to Plato, the craftsman, he suggests, pictures a mental image of an ideal Form and uses it as a modle to make a specific, perceptible, tangible and ready-to-use crafted product. Like nature, this crafted product is an appearance, an imperfect copy of an ideal Form. The artist, however, copies nature or a specific, crafted product, without knowing their inner workings.

⁻⁴²⁻, Ernst Gombrich, “Art and Illusion: a study in the psychology of pictorial representation”, New York: Bollingen Foundation, Pantheon Books, 1961. Latest edition: London, Phaidon, 1968.

resentation, even the most realistic, is influenced by the conceptual schema, by the vocabulary, by the preconceptions that a painter has about painting, by the tradition in which he was raised, the technique he has acquired. According to him, all art is basically conceptual'⁴³

Chinese calligraphy and oriental painting are based on a different system than western painting ⁴⁴. The main idea of Chinese painting is not to be realistic, it is more experimental, emotional and flexible. A short sentence to distinguish the difference between western painting and Chinese painting might be like this: traditional oil painting depicts highly vivid versions of objective things, while Chinese painting pays more attention to expressing the internal spirit of objects and painter's emotion. But the way one learns to paint in the East and the practice itself share the similar concept with western critique of 'imitations of imitations' Gerhard Richter argues the opposite of imitation:

'The first impulse towards painting, or towards art in general, stems from the need to communicate, the effort to fix one's own vision, to deal with appearances which are alien and must be given names and meanings. Without this, all work would be pointless and justified, like Art for Art's Sake. The idea that art copies nature is a fatal misconception. Art has always operated against nature and for reason.'⁴⁵

In the book of 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Repro-

-43-, "Thinking Art", 2.3.1 A First Fundamental Criticism of Imitation Theory: Ernst Gombrich. PP, 22-25.

-44-, The material has special characteristic. For instance, oriental paper and silk is transparent and flux, and pigment extract from natural rock. To be able to paint, water is the fundamental element will be use for whole practice as the same function as turpentine in oil painting. More water on the brush, more difficult to controle.

duction', Benjamin investigated the extent to which artistic production had fundamentally changed at a time when the technical reproducibility of art, especially thanks to the rise of photography and film, had reached a height never seen before.

The revolution of technical reproducibility of the work of art implies a fundamental change in its nature, Which Benjamin describes as the loss of 'aura'. the technical reproduction aims to transpose the original work of art into situations that would be out of reach for the original itself. As Benjamin explain: 'Above all, it enables the original to meet the beholder halfway, be it in the form of a photograph or a photograph record. The cathedral leaves its locale to be received in the studio of a lover of art, the choral production, performed in an auditorium or in the open air, resounds in the drawing room'⁴⁶

The technique of reproduction disengages the original work from its traditional reach. Van den Braembussche extends Benjamin's notion, suggesting "since the technique dose not reproduce the original, but rather only multiplies copies of it, the work of art loses its unique existence". I would add that what the observer actually sees is not even a copy of the original, but rather, to quote Plato, "an imitation of an imitation".

Furthermore, Benjamin explains the revolutionary potential of 'reproduction' art by respectively comparing a painter and a magician to a cameraman and a surgeon ⁴⁷. According to Benjamin, 'reproduction'(photograpy and film) art has enabled further exploration of our perception because it presents us with a much more accurate image of situation at 'hand'.

Indeed, Benjamin established the fact that works of art have always been reproduced. The latter heralded a whole new era because it enabled the graphic arts industry to market its products both in mass

-45-, Gerhard Richter, 'TEXT- Writings, Interviews and letters 1961-2007', Notes 1962, PP, 14.

-46-, Walter Benjamin, ' The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in Walter Benjamin, Illuminations: essays and reflections, edited and with an introduction by Hannah Arendt, New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968. PP, 220-221

production, as well as in forms that could be changed on daily basis. New technology made works of art reproducible, even if only through a photographic print. Moreover, new artistic procedures developed into art forms that have taken their own place among the other more traditional art forms. Photography and cinematography have truly influenced the art field. Not only the way artist produce their work, but also the ways in which the artwork is viewed (exhibition), making the creation and exhibition of artwork more efficient, driving out its cult value.

-47-, He argues, a magician maintains a natural distance between himself and his patient: on the one hand he reduces it very slightly by laying on of hands, on the other hand he also increase it because of his inaccessible and mysterious authority, The surgeon dose exactly the opposite: he reduces the distance between him and his patient by penetrating into the patient's body, but at decisive moment he avoids any real contact with the patient as human being. Magician and surgeon relate to each other in the same way as the painter and camerama. The painter maintains a natural distance from reality, whereas the cameraman provides an image that consist "of multiple fragments which are assembled under a new law.

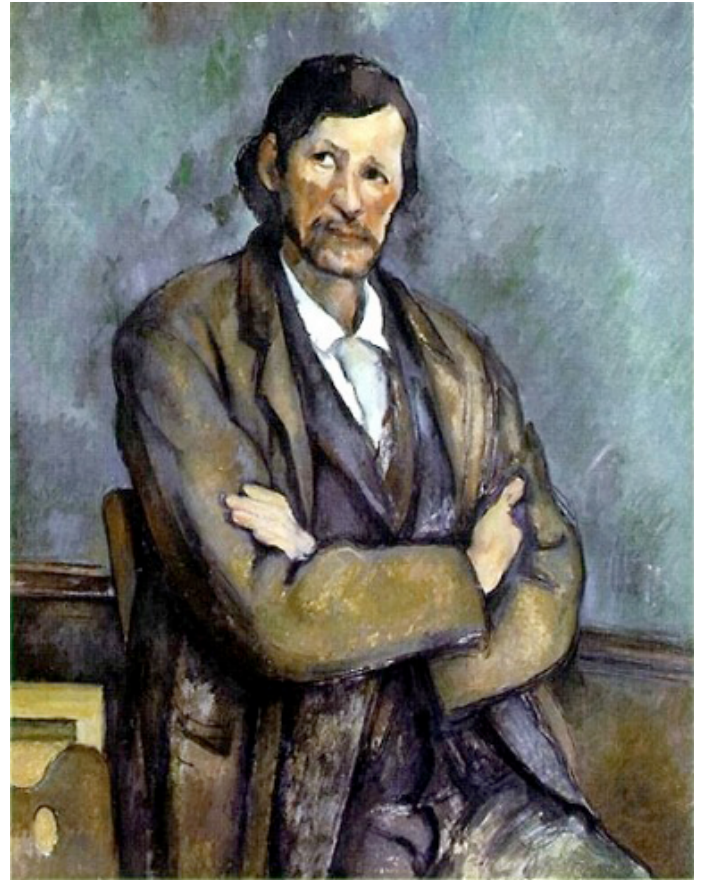


Figure 25:
'My Old Master After Jorma Puranen', Jorma Puranen

Figure 26:
'Man with crossed Arms', Paul Cezanne, 1899.

Conclusion

Shrinking the distance, reducing the representation, disturbing the interpretation, escaping the illustration and liberating the figure: ultimately sticking to facts. **I am interested in how to visualize the difference between them in order to understand how meaning is constructed and how is it perceived.**

Foot-binding is a container to assist my artistic research. A transformation of deconstructing those symbolic materials to be a code which contains the sophisticated phenomenon behind this dying custom and in order to block the narrative and limited communication to perceive the possibilities. **For me, nothing can be simplified, the possibilities are not only a representation of artwork, but also a thing to themselves.**

Based on rules and systems, every reconstruction tends to chaos. Every order tend to disorder. All our constructions of necessities and redundancies are trying to find their most comfortable position, which is lying on the ground as horizontal as possible. None of the materials used want to try to continue standing right up, they are looking forward to lie down and to be as horizontal as possible. They want to find the way to least resistance, by lying as flat as can be. Finally we will be freed from our suffering, even the hedonists.

1, Antoon Van den Baembussche,

'*Thinking Art*', Springer Science, Business Media B.V, 2009. 1994(First Edition).
2006(Fourth Edition)

2, Barbara Bolt,

'*Art Beyond Representation: The performative Power of the Image*' I.B.Tauris&CoLtd. 2004.

3, Chong TianZi,

'*Xiang yan cong shu*', Shang Wu Shu Ju Press, 1914, 4:8, quoted in Levy 1992, 109.

4, Chao Xueqin,

'*Dream of Red Chamber*', edited by Abridged, English published by Anchor, 1958.

5, Dorothea Olkowski,

'*Gilles Deleuze and the Ruin of Representation*', University of California Pree, 1999.

6, Ebrey, Patricia Buckley,

'*Cambridge Illustrated History of China*' (2nd ed.), Cambridge university 2010, Press.

7, Ethan Kleinberg,

'*Generation Existential: Heidegger's Philosophy in France*', 1927-1961, Cornell University 2005 Press.

8, Ernst Gombrich,

'*Art and Illusion: a study in the psychology of pictorial representation*', New York: Bollingen Foundation, Pantheon Books, 1961. Latest edition: London, Phaidon, 1968.

9, Feng JiCai,

'*Three-Inche Golden Lotus*' ,University of Hawaii Press. 1944.

10, Fang Xun,

doctor of Fragrant Lotus , '*The classification of the Qualities of Fragrant Lotuses*'

11, Gilles Deleuze,

'*Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*'. University of Minnesota Press, 2003.

12, Gilles Deleuze,

'*Gilles Deleuze and the Theater of Philosophy*', Edited by Constantin V. Boundas and Dorothea Olkowski, (First edition 1994) New York: Routledge.

13, Gerhard Richter, ' '

TEXT- Writings, Interviews and letters 1961-2007', edited by Dietmar Elger and Hans Ulrich Obrist. First published in United Kingdom in 2009 by Thames & Hudson Ltd, 181A High Holborn, London WC1V 7QX.

14, James Elkins,

'*On Some Limits of Materiality in Art History*', Das Magazin des Instituts für Theorie[Zürich] 12 (2008): 25–30. Special issue Taktilität: Sinneserfahrung als Grenzerfahrung, edited by Stefan Neuner and Julia Gelshorn.

15, Jacques Derrida,

'*Dissemination*', London, Athlone Press; Chicago University Press, 1981.

16, Jean-Francois Lyotard,

'*The Inhuman: reflections on time*', Stanford, CA: Standford University Press 1991.

17, Lisa Jardine,

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